DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 522 UD 012 466

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TITLE	Cultural Differences Revealed Through Language. NCRIEEO Tipsheet, Number 8.
INSTITUTION	Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. National Center for Research and Information on Equal Educational Opportunity.
SPONS AGENCY	Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	May 72
NOTE	6p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Biculturalism; Bilingual Education; *Bilingualism; Bilingual Students; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Factors; Cultural Pluralism; Culture Conflict; Educational Opportunities; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; English (Second Language); Language Handicapped; *Language Patterns; *Spanish Speaking

ABSTRACT

Biculturalism implies much more than bilingualism. Bilingualism has been defined in a variety of ways, but perhaps the most commonly accepted definition is varying degrees of understanding of two languages. But biculturalism implies knowing and being able to operate successfully in two cultures. This means knowing two modes of behavior, and knowing the beliefs, values, customs, and mores of two different groups of people. The language used at a particular time and place would have the referents in the culture the language represents. Not "all little children are alike": children are different because cultures force all of them to think, react, value, believe, and act in certain modes. It appears that one even learns in very distinct patterns because of cultural differences. Teachers must accept these differences in students and start working to provide equal educational opportunity in the classrooms. One could capitalize on the language children bring to school. The students have already internalized the sound patterns of a language and their written work could be based on these sounds. If these sound patterns are Spanish, the instruction should be in Spanish. Simultaneously, with this instruction, the second language should be introduced systematically. (Author/JM)

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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES REVEALED THROUGH LANGUAGE

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NCRIEEO TIPSHEET #8

MAY 1972

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Biculturalism implies much more than bilingualism. Bilingualism has been defined in a variety of ways, but perhaps the most commonly accepted definition is varying degrees of understanding two languages. But biculturalism implies knowing and being able to operate successfully in two cultures. This means knowing two modes of behavior. It means knowing the beliefs, the values, the customs, and the mores of two different groups of people. The language used at a particular time and place would have the referents in the culture the language represents.

Do we teachers have to treat bicultural students differently from monolingual students? What do we need to know to be effective in our chosen field of endeavor? We are going to have to know and accept the cultural differences that exist in our students, if we are to give them success in school. There are many ways open to us to learn about our students.

There are many clues to cultural differences if we take the time to look for them. Language is an excellent source to study these differences. The language tells us much about the people who speak it natively. And language should be of maximum importance to the teacher, regardless of the content he teaches.

Language gives clues to the feelings of people. It also lets us know from what perspective the speaker views phenomena. We "feel" and view things distinctly when we are raised in different cultures. The same word in one language will often not produce the same reaction when translated into another language. Even some concepts aren't accepted in the same manner because we have been conditioned to feel differently about many things.

This alone should help us understand that not "all little children are alike." Children are different because cultures force all of us to think, react, value, believe, and act in certain modes. It appears that we even learn in very distinct patterns because of cultural differences. We, as teachers, must accept these differences in our students and start working to provide *equal* educational opportunity in our classrooms. The students may be alike physically, even the same color, but if these youngsters have been brought up in different cultures, they will think differently!

Let me illustrate a few cultural differences revealed through language by contrasting English and Spanish. Let us now transport ourselves to a nice, new, modern airport where airplanes are buzzing in and out every few minutes. In case you don't get to the airport in time for your scheduled flight, you can always arrange to take a later flight. But if you don't make that flight, in the English speaking world, it is your fault. Maybe you didn't get to the airport in time for you overslept because your mother-in-law turned off the alarm clock. Or maybe on the way to the airport you noticed you had on a dress shoe on your right foot and a tennis shoe on your left foot and you had to return to the house to let the "little woman" have it for not taking care of you instead of devoting so much time to the children. But whatever the rationalization you care to use, it is *your* fault. The only way you can express it in English is, "I missed the airplane."

You want to know how to express this same idea in Spanish? I'm sorry, but that idea doesn't exist in Spanish; this doesn't occur in the Spanish world! When the Spanish speaker doesn't get to the airport on time to catch his scheduled flight, he simply says, *el avión me dejó.* The airplane left you! There is *no* way that you can say that you missed the airplane in Spanish. The implication is that if the pilot were slightly more intelligent he would have waited for his passenger. The implication adds further that it appears he should have known you were coming. Ah, the beautiful reflexive form that makes things happen without human interference!

Let us look at another example of the use of the reflexive. When an English-speaking person is holding a plate in his hand and he drops it, he immediately becomes the guilty person. *He* drops the plate. It is his fault. But if the same phenomenon happens to a Spanish-speaking person he can only express it as, *se cayó el plato.* He was holding it, but the plate gathered momentum and got away from him. The plate actually moved itself. The person had little to do with it.

What have these examples told us about the children we are attempting to teach? They have told us much, if we are willing to listen. They have told us that Spanish-speaking children feel differently from Anglo children about certain things. Some children could have guilty feelings about things that other children don't. Some children think they are at fault sometimes, while other children don't. Children from different cultures don't necessarily feel the same way about guilt.

"She dropped the plate"

"Se cayo el plato"

"El Avion me dejo"

(The Airplane left me)

How can one feel guilty about things he has no control over? In the Spanish-speaking world, and I am now referring to those in the *traditional* Spanish-speaking world, there is the belief of being controlled by destiny. Those Spanish speakers who find themselves in the various positions on the continuum of acculturation believe less in control by destiny. When something happens, the Spanish speaker is not sure if he really caused it to happen.

Does this mean the Spanish-speaking are not responsible people? Does it mean they do not accept responsibility? Does it mean they do things and if the things go wrong, shrug their shoulders and sigh, "Well, it was going to happen."

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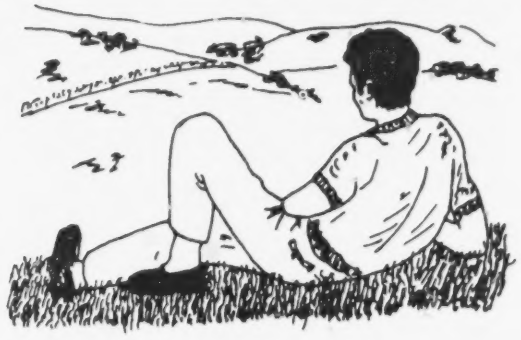
It doesn't mean that at all. The Spanish-speaking keep trying as long as anyone else. But when doors are closed or a point of impasse is reached, they feel destiny controls. The language reveals their true feelings. *Lo que Dios diga. Lo que será, será. Lo que Dios mande.* They have no guilty feelings because sometimes destiny is beyond their control.

In the Anglo world, man controls destiny. Man controls his environment. This implies that when things get out of control, man is the guilty one. People from the two cultures feel *differently* about destiny.

Spanish - "Lo que sera, sera"

Anglo - "I control destiny"



In the Spanish culture, people as a whole appear to enjoy every minute to its fullest. There is time for people; time for personal relations. Business dealings can never be started without the common courtesies of asking for the health of your loved ones. In the Anglo world, achievement is extremely important. They get many things done fast. Anglo-America gets much of the credit for such outstanding accomplishments as getting men on the moon!

Is it necessary to make a choice between these two ways of life? The answer lies in *us*. What are we willing to do to promote cultural understanding?

Spanish - "El reloj anda"

What else can language tell us about cultural differences? Let us examine a few individual words. In the Anglo world, the clock *runs*. This one word tells us a great deal of the people who use it. It implies future, momentum, action, movement. In the Spanish world, how does one explain time? It's said, *el reloj anda*. The clock "walks." What does this imply? Perhaps that there's more time for people; that they are not in such a hurry to conduct business. Words, even isolated words, tell us much about people. If we as teachers would only *listen* to children, how much we would learn about them. How sensitive we would become to their needs.

Let us continue with a few more words to show that people from the two cultures feel differently about certain things. What does the word nepotism mean to you? If you are Anglo,

English - "The clock runs"

it is a terrible word. It implies dishonesty, favoritism, and always some type of shananigan. The few people that practice it are evil, and certainly not very democratic. But if you live in the Spanish culture, nepotism is good. The extended family concept is part of it; one helps the family whenever one can. Anglos can continue getting jobs for their enemies if they want to, but those that live in a Spanish culture will continue getting jobs for their loved ones if they are in a position to do so. Remember, family feelings in the Spanish culture extend beyond consanguineal lines. Close friends become part of the family. The reservoir of talents for positions are not limited. To conclude, in the Anglo world, nepotism is bad; in the Spanish world, nepotism is good and beautiful. Does a teacher, teaching about nepotism, communicate with his students, when his point of reference is different from theirs? We teachers are going to have to know cultural differences and their implications for learning, if we are to succeed with culturally different students.

Let us take the word "sophisticated." In the Anglo world, the word is meant to be a very high compliment. It's a positive concept. In most of the Spanish world, *sofisticada* is an insult; a negative feeling is produced when the word is uttered. It implies "putting on the dog." Are these words translatable? We can't possibly communicate with minority group youngsters when we aren't aware of some of these subtleties.

A concept that we as teachers are famous for teaching at all grade levels is the concept of the "family." In the Anglo context, family usually implies the nuclear concept of father, mother, and one or two children. But in the Spanish world, the term family connotes the idea of many people; some that are related and some that are not. It includes all those people that they love. When a teacher discusses the concept of a family (and because he is a master teacher, of course he has a picture in his file to help him get the concept across), he usually shows a visual of the parents and two children. Who do you think is not understanding the concept because his experiential background has prepared him differently?

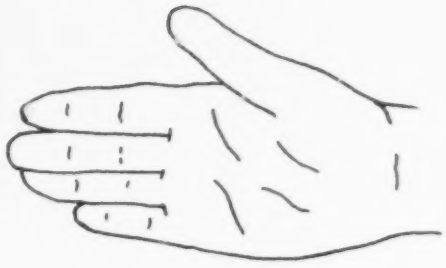
The idea of female beauty is interesting to compare in the two cultures also. In the Anglo world, the model of beauty is tall, has fair skin, blue eyes and blond hair. In the Spanish world, the model of beauty is small in stature, has olive skin, dark eyes, and black hair. What happens when only the Anglo model is constantly presented to students who cannot identify with it? Yes, negative self-concepts are the result.

Let us discuss another difference between those reared in the Spanish culture and those reared in the Anglo culture. Views toward animals are very different. In the Anglo world, animals can take on almost human characteristics, can almost become members of the family. They get distemper shots, special diets, collars with rhinestones, and get groomed at fancy grooming parlors. In the Spanish world, animals are functional. A word doesn't even exist in Spanish for "pet." The concept simply doesn't exist. How does the language reflect these views?

In the Anglo world, one word suffices to describe the parts of both the human and the animal; "neck" for the animal and "neck" for the human being. It continues with leg, back, and mouth. In the Spanish culture there is a set of vocabulary to describe animals and another set to describe humans. For neck there is *pescuezo* for the animal and *cuello* for the human beings; for leg there is *pata* for the animal, *pierna* for the human being; for back, there is *espinazo* for the animal, *espalda* for the human being; and for mouth, there is *hocico* for the animal and *boca* for the human being. In the "traditional" English-speaking classroom we use one word to describe parts of both animals and humans. Not being aware of these *subtle* differences is what communication barriers are about. It could lead to misunderstanding instead of learning.

The gestures referring to humans and animals are different to the two worlds also. In the Anglo world, the gesture to show the size of a human being and the size of an animal is the same. But in the Spanish world, there are two distinct gestures. The one used in the Anglo world is used to indicate the size of animals only. To show the size of a human, one holds his hand turned vertically so that the thumb is pointing upward instead of in the flat horizontal position. Silent language tells so much. Sensitive teachers are aware; insenstive ones don't care.

ANIMALS



HUMANS

A few examples fo language differences have been enumerated above. Are traditional schools meeting these differences? Johnny has the type of culture and the language that is represented in the typical school; *Juanito* doesn't have the language that is requested of him and sometimes his culture is in direct conflict with the one adhered to in school.

What needs to be known to become an effective teacher? By all means, cultural differences should be known, understood, and accepted. In addition, some elements of language should be studied. One thing, we as teachers should believe, is that learning a second language is not easy. When people learn a second language, they have mastered a very difficult task indeed. The poem that follows seems to illustrate the difficulty quite appropriately.

ENGLISH
by Dr. Richard N. Krogh

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you
On hiccough, thorough, slough and through?
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps
To learn of less familiar traps?

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Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead; it's said like bed, not bead;
For goodness sake, don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat,
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).
A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.

And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up – and goose and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward,
And font and front and word and sword.
And do and go, then thwart and cart,
Come, come, I've hardly made a start.

A dreadful language? Why, man alive,
I'd learned to talk it when I was five,
And yet to write it, the more I tried,
I hadn't learned it at fifty-five.

(The author does not know where or when this poem was published. If a reader knows, please write to the author.)

I know that most of us agree that English isn't easy. But have we really internalized the feelings, the frustrations, that must accompany learning a second language? Are we at least anticipating some of the problems our students are going to face?

Let us be aware of the help native Spanish speakers learning English need. Perhaps the following reminders will help us be better teachers.

Help with consonant clusters. Students often insert vowels to help them form the sounds. (bur*sts*, as*ks*, inst*incts*)

Help with vowels. Short vowels are especially difficult.
(sit –– seat) (bought –– boat)

Help with contractions. Students usually don't hear or don't produce the consonant.(I've, I'd, It's)

Help with some of the consonants. (V-B; S-Z; etc)

Help with word order. (red rose –– rosa roja)

Help with prepositions.

in	Washington
on	Washington Street
at	817 Washington Street

Help with subjects. (It) is raining
Está lloviendo.

These are just a few of the "helps" needed. The biggest help these students need, want, and expect is the empathetic teacher who believes these students come from a respectable culture, are worthy individuals, and can succeed.

Somehow, techniques and materials are in second place in a classroom where a teacher like the one described exists.

Continuing with other thoughts on language learning leads one to think about bilingual and bicultural education. One *could* capitalize on the language children bring to school! The students have already internalized the sound patterns of a language and their written work could be based on these sounds. If these sound patterns are English, the beginning instruction should be in English; if they are Spanish, the instruction should then be in Spanish. Simultaneously with this instruction, the second language should be introduced *systematically*. At the beginning, this instruction would be for a rather small percentage of the time with large blocks of time for learning *in* the native language. In this phase of instruction, the sound patterns of the second language should be taught before proceeding to the written language. Following these procedures, we would produce bilingual children, that is, the students would know two languages well. It makes sense to continue the student's cognitive development while learning a second language. It also makes sense to attempt to avoid the trauma a child must undergo when he finds himself in a world where his language and culture are suddenly denied.

Through the type of content we introduced to teach these languages, we could produce bicultural students. The content should be the beliefs and values of the two groups, both Spanish and Anglo. It should include customs, mores, history, fine arts, foods, and all other elements that constitute a way of life of a given group of people. The referents for the two languages should be kept separately. This, too, produces bicultural people.

These fortunate students would then know two modes of behavior and would be completely comfortable in the two worlds. No, these students wouldn't be schizophrenic. They would change behavior called for in the two cultures much like the reader changes behavior to meet the needs of the particular group he is with at a given time. A true biculturate internalizes the two modes of behavior.

Perhaps this is the appropriate place to discuss the language the child brings to school. Some people would have you believe the language the child speaks isn't "correct" and therefore,cannot be used for instructional purposes. The language may be a dialect, perhaps not "standard" but definitely a language with which a large group of people communicate beautifully! Perhaps one of the aims of bilingual programs should be to guide students toward learning a "standard" version of a language, but certainly not by creating negative feelings in the children about their language, be it what it may be.

Many of these children have internalized the sound system of Spanish, as well as the structure. What they need is help in the area of vocabulary development in their native language like everyone else who studies his native language, regardless of what it is.

Language is vital to human beings. Let us capitalize on its potential to teach us about those people who speak languages different from ours. Let us use languages toward building bridges of cultural understanding.

5

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